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ABSTRACT

This brochure describes the AASCU/Sallie Mae National Retention Project's goals, beginnings, continuing work, and participants. An introduction describes how the Project has resulted in over 370 state institutions looking closely at their effectiveness in student learning and achievement and at emerging accountability requirements. An overview then reviews trends that prompted the national-level examination of student achievement issues, discusses the Project's focus on institutional capacity as the unit of analysis rather than student behavior, and describes an annual survey that gathers data on retention issues. Project activities are then reviewed chronologically, from start-up in 1992-1993 through reorientation in 1993-1994, highlighting the need to enhance campus infrastructure support for minority and nontraditional student retention and the establishment of mentoring relationships between institutions that were more and less successful with student retention. The Project's dissemination, evaluation, and discussion efforts are also described. The brochure concludes with a list of advisory panel members and a list of participating colleges and universities. (JB)

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INTRODUCTION

Calls for greater accountability from higher education have been heard at both the state and national levels recently. Some states have initiated "report cards" and other measures to monitor how well scarce resources are invested and used. For those who look beyond simple measures of accountability, the real test of institutional effectiveness resides in how well it fosters student learning and achievement.

Through the AASCU/Sallie Mae National Retention Project, over 370 state colleges and universities and their affiliated systems of higher education have had the opportunity to look closely at their effectiveness and have begun to focus on these fundamental issues while preparing themselves to meet the emerging accountability requirements. AASCU member institutions, by reason of their regional focus and special missions, have opened the doors to educational opportunity to many with varying degrees of success. They are now aware of the new challenges related to fostering student achievement and are examining the issue of how to convert access into success for a much larger proportion of their students.

To be successful, campuses will need to focus on strategies for effecting institutional change. Here, institutional change cannot be achieved by superficial means. It will require fundamental reform of campus cultures to support diversity and conversion of the learning environment from a teacher-centered one to a learner-centered one. This ambitious agenda will require strong leadership from presidents and chancellors along with informed, strategic decision making. AASCU believes that it has the capacity, through its ground-breaking work on the National Retention Project, to support its member presidents in this endeavor.

Pamela G. Arrington
Director
AASCU/Sallie Mae
National Retention
Project

PROJECT OVERVIEW

More than a third of all students and, similarly of all minority students, enroll at institutions belonging to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). State colleges and universities have been successful in affording access to students traditionally underrepresented in American higher education. However, while playing an important role in opening educational opportunity, AASCU members are not always equally successful in bringing students to graduation. AASCU determined that there was a need to focus at the national level on student achievement issues. Using NCAA Division I data, AASCU found members reporting graduation rates below the NCAA-I average (37 percent vs. 53 percent) for 1991.

In 1991, concerned about the academic success for students traditionally underrepresented in American higher education, AASCU initiated a project intended to sensitize members to retention issues generally and to help state colleges and universities improve their retention and graduation rates for all students, but especially for minority students. The project is unique because it focuses on institutional capacity as the unit of analysis whereas most research on retention studies individual student behavior. The National Retention Project approach has the advantage of allowing schools to attack retention problems systemically and to measure the consequences of organizational change.

With support from the Student Loan Marketing Association (Sallie Mae), AASCU administered annual surveys to member institutions in each year of the project. The survey, a research tool at the center of the data-gathering component of the project, was different in each of the two years. This change reflected different data needs, experience in working with retention models and data, and multiple purposes including heightening the awareness of presidents about the need to develop better academic support systems and to track student achievement by gender, ethnicity and transfer status.

The surveys asked members to assess their strengths/weaknesses in retention and to report retention and graduation rates for various cohorts. Data collected have been used to select project participants, track enrollment trends, identify model programs and assess the need for policy initiatives in student retention.

With data from the 1992 and 1993 surveys, AASCU selected 76 institutions to participate in an endeavor to disseminate good practices in retention and to improve institutional effectiveness in retaining minority students to graduation. Each year, 35-40 presidents and campus teams participate in regional retention conferences hosted by leaders in student retention. A national advisory panel of retention scholars provides expertise in research and practice and consults with project participants on activities, outcomes and dissemination of project results. AASCU established regional/state networks and continues to feature a session on retention at its annual meeting to encourage continuing dialogue and learning on the topic.

PROJECT START-UP: 1992-1993

Implementation of the three-year national project on retention, funded by the Student Loan Marketing Association (Sallie Mae) moved forward rapidly. The leadership committee composed of Presidents Herman James of Rowan College of New Jersey, Diana Natalicio of the University of Texas at El Paso, and Wendell Rayburn of Lincoln University (Mo.), selected 36 first-year participants from 170 respondents to a two-part retention survey sent to all AASCU presidents in August 1992.

The retention project was launched at the November 1992 AASCU Annual Meeting, where President Larry Hough of Sallie Mae addressed a focus session and the first-year presidents were recognized. In spring 1993, three regional "retention" conferences were held involving campus teams comprised of presidents, academic and student life vice presidents, key faculty, and institutional research and equity personnel. A national advisory panel of retention scholars, to assist AASCU in research design, conference planning and information dissemination, was selected and announced.

President Herman James, Rowan College of New Jersey, hosted the Eastern Regional Retention Conference March 11-12, 1993 at Atlantic City for some 70 presidents, their staff, and representatives from Sallie Mae.

Following the Eastern Conference, AASCU held two other regional meetings in spring 1993. President Diana Natalicio of the University of Texas at El Paso hosted the Western Regional Conference on her campus on May 2-3, and President Wendell G. Rayburn Sr. of Lincoln University hosted the Central Regional Conference at St. Louis on June 27-28.

For the Central Conference, three Sallie Mae affiliates—TCF Bank of Minneapolis, the Chase Manhattan Bank, N.A., and the Mercantile Bank of St. Louis, N.A.—provided support for participating institutions.

Following a national search, Pamela Arrington was named as director of the National Retention Project, in June 1993. Dr. Arrington came to AASCU on leave from her appointment as associate professor at Bowie State University.

In 1992, the annual survey on retention asked members to report on retention policies and practices as well as persistence and graduation rates. There were 170 respondents in 1992 to help AASCU delineate retention efforts on member campuses and identify issues needing further attention. Several issues emerged from the 1992 data analysis. All pointed to the need to enhance campus infrastructure support for minority and nontraditional student retention.

PROJECT REORIENTATION: 1993-1994

The National Advisory Panel of retention scholars met at AASCU September 20, 1993, for an inaugural meeting. They critiqued the 1993 retention survey and *Directory of Model Programs* which was released later at the 1993 AASCU Annual Meeting in San Diego.

For 1993-94, Presidents David Carter, Eastern Connecticut State University, Judith Ramaley, Portland State University, and John Worthen, Ball State University join the project leadership team founded by Presidents Herman James, Rowan College (N.J.), Diana Natalicio, University of Texas-El Paso and Wendell Rayburn, Lincoln University (MO.). 1993-94 host campuses and 36 institutional participants were announced at the concurrent session November 22, 1993 at the Annual Meeting.

Dr. Clinita Ford, alumna of Lincoln University (Mo.), who has organized a national conference on Black Student Retention since 1984, addressed the retention session on programs and policies that promote the retention and graduation of students traditionally underrepresented in American higher education. A summary of the talk, *Baker's Dozen of Retention Tips*, was featured as an insert to the December 17th AASCU biweekly newsletter, MEMO TO THE PRESIDENT. President Herman James, Rowan College (NJ) moderated the session, and Larry Hough, CEO of Sallie Mae, gave remarks.

For the 1993 survey, members were asked to report the actual number of students in various cohorts so that data could be analyzed at the aggregate level. There were 188 respondents with selected institutions being announced at a concurrent session on retention at the 1993 Annual Meeting.

For the first time, AASCU sent all survey respondents a summary report on data collected. The feedback reports showed members how their retention and graduation rates compared with all other respondents'. Presidents were advised that institutional graduation rate data are confidential and only reported back to the responding institution.

The survey, designed to monitor the progress of institutions through the stages outlined in Richard Richardson's model (1991), permitted AASCU to delineate the status of retention efforts among members, to identify issues needing further attention and to classify respondents according to Richardson's three stages of retention program development: reactive, strategic, or adaptive. At the inaugural meeting of the advisory committee, Professor Richard Richardson offered to share with AASCU his data from retention studies dating back to 1988, which may lead to some longitudinal assessments on program effectiveness in some of the participating institutions.

The 1993 survey on retention for the first time, modeled what was expected to be the required data elements in the forthcoming "Student-Right-to-Know" reports to the Department of Education. This represented the best available information from researchers and the National Center for Education Statistics.

To assist AASCU member schools who reported six-year graduation rates below 30 percent on the 1993 retention survey or were

unable to report any data on various cohorts, staff activated a special demonstration project. Organized around the concept of mentoring, the project links institutions with lower graduation rates with others that are more effective in this arena and who agree to act as a resource to them. The goal of the model is to assist members to improve retention and graduation rates and to adapt campus environments for diversely-prepared students using state/regional networks. A total of 16 mentor-mentee teams have been formed.

A key component of project design are three regional retention conferences. All 75 schools now involved were invited to attend the 1994 regional conferences as well as schools invited to participate in the institutional mentoring demonstration project. Time was allotted for campus teams from the mentor and mentee schools to initiate a dialogue.

Average attendance at the regional conferences was 100 participants; a minimum of five presidents attended each. The average size of campus teams present was three. Regional conferences were hosted by David Carter, Eastern Connecticut State University in Hartford, April 14-15; Judith Ramaley, Portland State University, on campus, May 20-21; and John Worthen, Ball State University in Indianapolis, June 26-27. Program themes featured retention as a part of broader issues such as the inclusive university, developing learning communities, and campus culture.

DISSEMINATION, EVALUATION & DISCUSSION

From the first year of the project, AASCU published a summary of successful retention programs along with a directory of participants. The *Directory of Model Programs* was disseminated to all member presidents.

National Retention Project Director Pamela Arrington made presentations at six national meetings: the Ninth National Higher Education Conference on Black Student Retention at Hollywood, California and the Second Annual Conference, Retention 2000, at the University of Maryland in November 1993; Eighth Annual Conference on Minority Recruitment and Retention, University of Kentucky, Lexington, and the Second Forum on Faculty Roles and Rewards, American Association of Higher Education, New Orleans in January 1994; Ninth Annual Access and Equity Conference, South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, Orangeburg, February 1994; and the 9th Annual American Association of Higher Education Assessment and Quality Conference, June 1994, Washington, D. C. Her presentations focused on access and quality, effective retention programs and tracking/reporting systems, and faculty involvement in retention.

The project has been featured in the Jan. 27, 1994 issue of *Black Issues in Higher Education*, the Feb. 23, 1994 issue of the *Boston Globe*, and the April 1994 *Access Newsletter for Recruiting and Retaining Students of Color*, and on CNN Cable News Network.

President Earl Richardson of Morgan State University (Md.) cited AASCU/Sallie Mae National Retention Project and the NASULGC and AASCU Minority Graduate Feeder Project in testimony presented to the Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities of the United States Senate on May 17.

The 1993 retention survey results were mailed to members. Cohort data was used by state representatives in Pennsylvania and California to set benchmarks for six-year graduation rates for state schools.

A proposal for a videoconference, *Constructing Effective Learning Environments: Retention Strategies for Campus Diversity*, was accepted by PBS and scheduled for Feb. 9, 1995. A panel of retention experts, AASCU presidents and national policymakers will address the issue of retention.

Staff have begun exploratory factor and regression analyses of 1993 data as a first step in developing a conceptual model that describes the factors influencing graduation rates at AASCU schools and that explains the link between institutional culture, the learning environment and student success. Schools involved with the project the longest will be asked to designate campus teams who are interested in developing more appropriate student achievement measures for students at state colleges. A 1994 retention survey was administered in August 1994 to maintain the trend data collection effort and update the retention model programs database.

Using the results of its 1992, 1993 and 1994 surveys, AASCU has assisted members to improve their student tracking and reporting capabilities and their rates of participation, retention and graduation for students traditionally underrepresented in Ameri-

can higher education. With the advent of "Student-Right-to-Know" and other accountability measures, members will soon need to report more data than most now collect. It is apparent that institutions need:

- better academic support systems to track student achievement by gender, ethnicity and transfer status;
- institutional studies focusing on factors that cause attrition among selected cohorts;
- assistance in effecting institutional changes that will lead to improved rates of graduation for traditionally underrepresented populations;
- greater awareness of the diversity of learning styles found in today's student body;
- assistance in monitoring and assessing the impact of academic program and infrastructure changes on student achievement; and
- better understanding about the linkage between institutional culture, the learning environment and student success.

AASCU/SALLIE MAE NATIONAL RETENTION PROJECT ADVISORY PANEL

Dr. Clinita Ford, Coordinator
National Conference on Black Student Retention
Florida A&M University
Practitioner, interest in minority student retention, organizes national conference on minority retention

President Robert Glennen
Emporia State University, Kansas
AASCU *president, extensive experience in advising systems and effective advising for retention*

Dr. Rosario Martinez, Dean and Founding Director
The Aldine Center
North Harris College, Texas
Practitioner, interest in minority student retention and community college students transfer issues, state policy issues

Dr. Michael Nettles
School of Education
University of Michigan
Researcher, undergraduate education, policy issues

Dr. Richard Richardson
Department of Educational Leadership
Arizona State University
Change theory, institutional adaptation to accommodate diverse student body, leading toward integration

Dr. Karl Schilling
Western Programs
Miami University, Ohio
General education, retention as an academic issue, accountability

Dr. Vincent Tinto
National Center for the Study of Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Higher Education
Syracuse University, New York
Leader in teaching/learning reform since the 1970s

Dr. Julia Wells
Director of Higher Education Program Access and Equity
South Carolina Commission on Higher Education
Practitioner, state system and policy questions

AASCU/SALLIE MAE NATIONAL RETENTION PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Eastern Region

Appalachian State University, North Carolina
Bowie State University, Maryland
Eastern Connecticut State University
Georgia Southern University
Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania
Montclair State University, New Jersey
Old Dominion University, Virginia
Rowan College of New Jersey
Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania
Southern College of Technology, Georgia
State University of New York, Cortland
State University of New York, Geneseo
State University of New York, New Paltz
State University of New York, Old Westbury
State University of New York, Oswego
State University of New York, Potsdam
The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey
Towson State University, Maryland
University of South Carolina at Aiken
University of North Florida
University of Maine at Fort Kent
Westfield State College, Massachusetts

Central Region

Alcorn State University, Mississippi
Arkansas State University
Austin Peay State University, Tennessee
Ball State University, Indiana
Chicago State University, Illinois
Coastal Carolina University, South Carolina
East Tennessee State University
Eastern Illinois University
Grambling State University, Louisiana
Lincoln University, Missouri
Livingston University, Louisiana
Mankato State University, Minnesota
Memphis State University, Tennessee
Middle Tennessee State University
Mississippi University for Women
Morehead State University, Kentucky
Murray State University, Kentucky
Nicholls State University, Louisiana
Northeast Missouri State University
Northwestern State University of Louisiana
Southeast Missouri State University
Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville
St. Cloud State University, Minnesota
University of Wisconsin-Green Bay
University of Wisconsin-Stout
University of Northern Iowa
West Liberty State College, West Virginia
Western Michigan University
Wright State University

Western Region

Adams State College, Colorado
California Maritime Academy
California Polytechnic State University, Pomona
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
California State University, Northridge
California State University, Sacramento
East Texas State University
Eastern Montana University
Emporia State University, Kansas
Metropolitan State College of Denver
Portland State University, Oregon
Prairie View A&M University, Texas
Sam Houston State University, Texas
San Diego State University, California
San Jose State University, California
Sonoma State University, California
South Dakota School of Mines and Technology
Southwest Texas State University
University of Guam
University of Nebraska at Kearney
University of Northern Colorado
University of Southern Colorado
University of Texas at Arlington
University of Texas at El Paso
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